

**River's Farm Barn,
High Street,
Sproughton, Suffolk
SPT 037**

Historic Building Record

OASIS Ref: Suffolke1-77583



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River's Farm Barn, High Street (B1113), Sproughton, Suffolk

(TM 123 442)

Historic Building Record

This report provides a written and photographic record at English Heritage (2006) Level 2 of a redundant barn. It has been prepared to a brief written by Suffolk County Council's Archaeological Service (Edward Martin, 23rd March 2009, ref. SpecHBR_RiversFmBarnSproughton_09), and is intended to inform and accompany a planning application for conversion to Babergh District Council).

Introduction

The report is accompanied by a CD containing a photographic record in the form of 63 digital images (Appendix 1), but also includes 10 printed photographs of key features to illustrate the text (Appendix 2). Each image is described in a separate schedule and wherever possible includes a scale rod with half-metre divisions in red and white. The site was inspected on 25th March 2010.

Summary

River's Farm Barn adjoins the western side of Sproughton High Street (the B1113) at the southern entrance to the village, and lies on the eastern edge of a picturesque valley of wet pasture. The present building does not appear on the Sproughton tithe map of 1838 (figure 2) when an earlier structure on the same site belonged to Red House Farm on the Hadleigh Road 800 m to the east. The house to the north of the barn had presumably formed River's Farm in the past, but was already a pair of tenements in separate occupation.

The barn is a red brick field barn with an adjoining cattle yard and shelter shed built as a single complex in *circa* 1880. An inscribed date of 1882 on the high-quality brickwork may well commemorate its construction. It consists of a U-shaped range of single-storied sheds surrounding a central cattle yard entered from the south-east. The roofs were initially of slate with symmetrical hipped gables but this has been partly replaced with pantiles and the yard roof is a mid-20th century addition of corrugated asbestos. The western range forms a barn with double doors in its gable (framed by decorative cast iron brackets) that was designed as a granary where cattle feed was milled and stored rather than as a traditional threshing barn. The yard is framed on the north and east by an open-sided shelter shed with bolted knee-braces to its arcade posts and the complex includes a small calf shed and root house. The sheds have been stripped of fittings such as mangers and hay racks but the structure otherwise survives in largely original condition and represents both an attractive piece of architecture and a highly compact and efficient example of High Victorian agricultural design. It is accordingly of considerable historic interest, particularly given its conspicuous location. The presence of a pair of large and particularly well preserved apotropaic 'daisy wheel' symbols on the yard wall (to protect the cattle and grain from evil spirits) provides an additional point of historic interest which demonstrates the late survival of this medieval superstition in rural Suffolk.

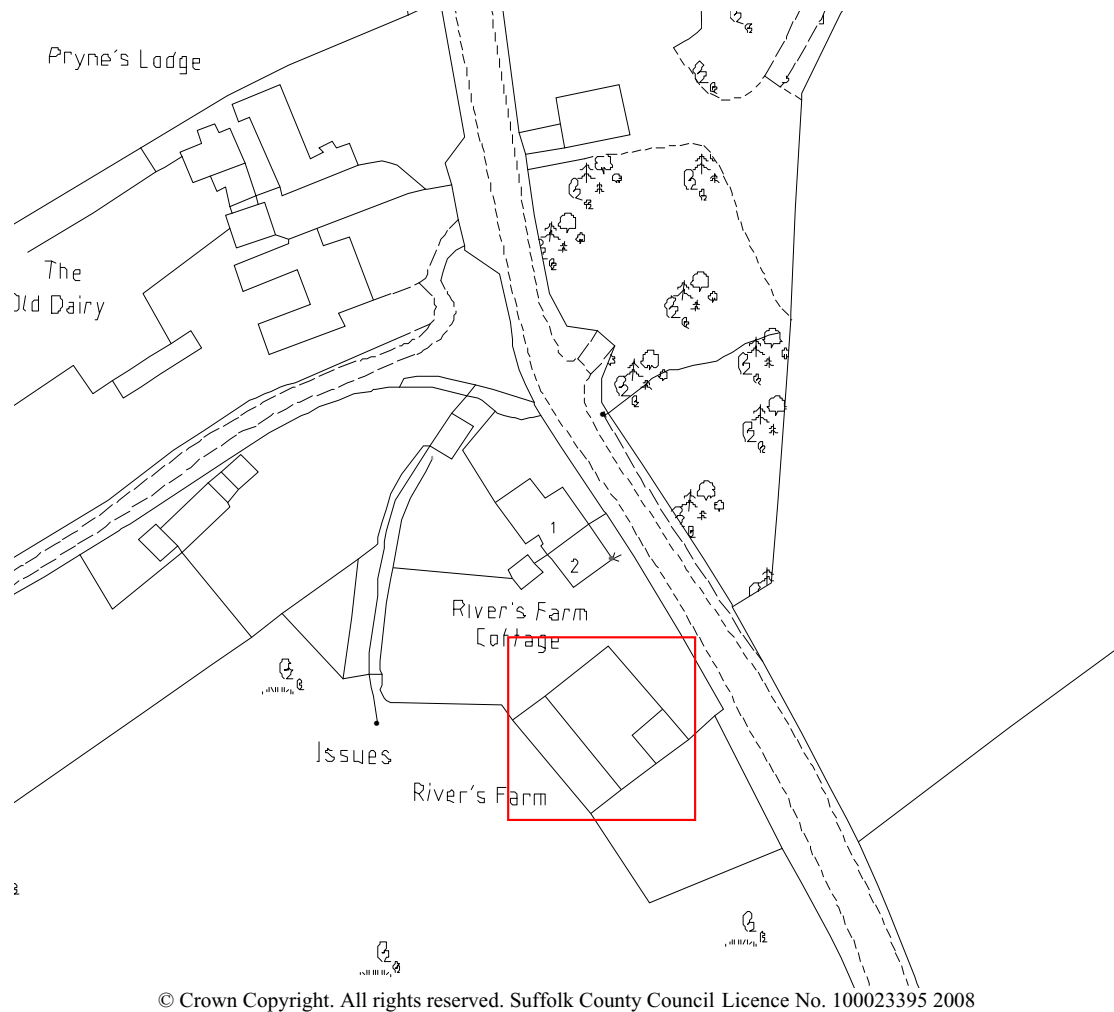


Figure 1
Current Ordnance Survey Site Plan
Outlining the field barn complex in a red square to the south of River's Farm Cottage.

Historic Context: Documentary & Cartographic Record

River's Farm Barn adjoins the western side of Sproughton High Street (the B1113) at the southern edge of the village, approximately 800m from the parish church. It abuts the garden of River's Farm Cottage on the north (divided into a pair of tenements) but is otherwise surrounded by open countryside and lies on the eastern edge of a picturesque shallow valley of wet pasture. The present building does not appear on the Sproughton tithe map of 1838 (figure 2) which shows an L-shaped structure on the same site. This earlier building belonged to the Revd. Thomas Woodward of Red House Farm 800 m to the east (on the western side of Hadleigh Road, near Chantry Park) but was leased to John Ranson with 93.5 acres of land to John Ranson who owned Poplar Farm 1.2 km to the south. Both farmhouses are listed at grade II and Red House Farm includes a listed brick threshing barn. The house to the north of the barn had presumably formed River's Farm in the past, but was already a pair of tenements in separate occupation by 1838. The building was described only as 'building and ground' in conjunction with the adjoining pasture of 5 acres known simply as 'The Hill' (plot 88 in figure 2). The neighbouring field on the south was 'Rivers Home Field' (90). The existing barn was shown for the first time on the first edition 25 inch Ordnance Survey of 1882, and remains largely unaltered. The internal partitions shown on the Ordnance Surveys of 1904 and 1927 suggest the shelter shed (no. 3 in figure 6) had been sub-divided, but the original calf shed (2) is omitted and these details may not be accurate.



Figure 2

Sproughton title map of 1838 (Suffolk Record Office) showing an L-shaped outbuilding on the site of the present barn complex & a pair of semi-detached cottages to the north.

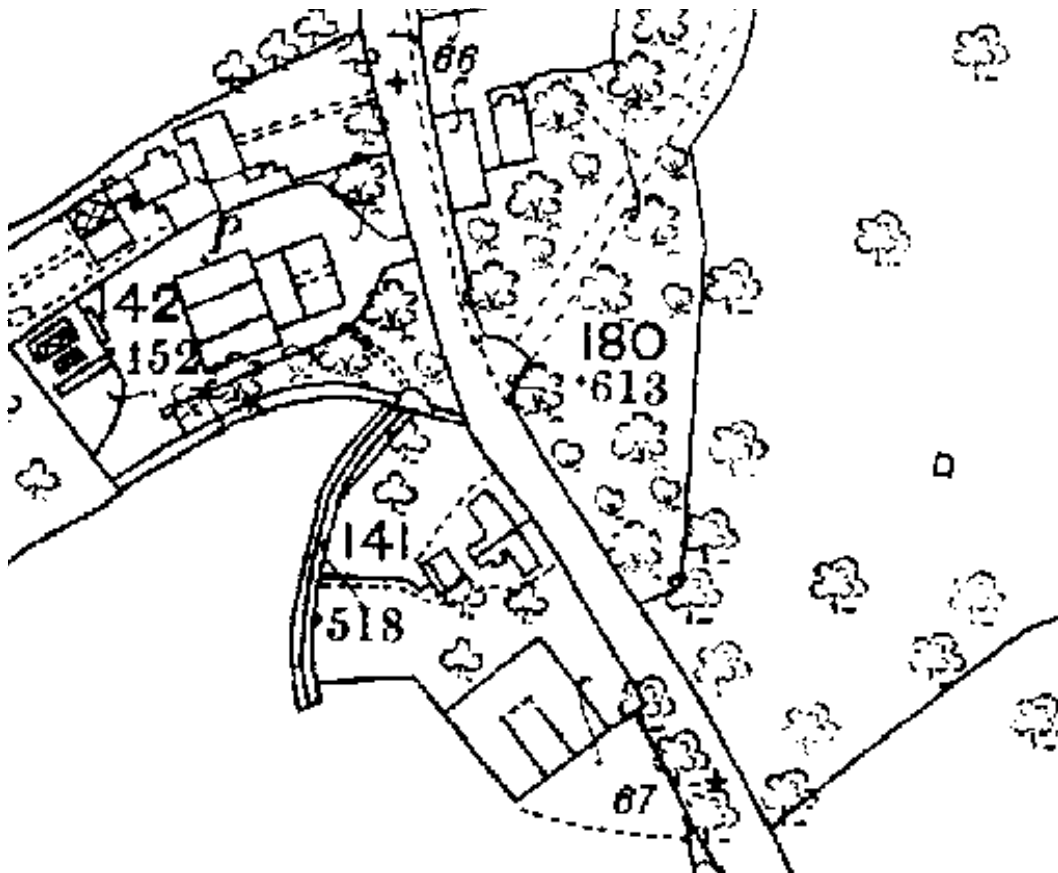


Figure 3

The first edition 25 inch Ordnance Survey of 1882 showing the existing U-shaped complex for the first time.

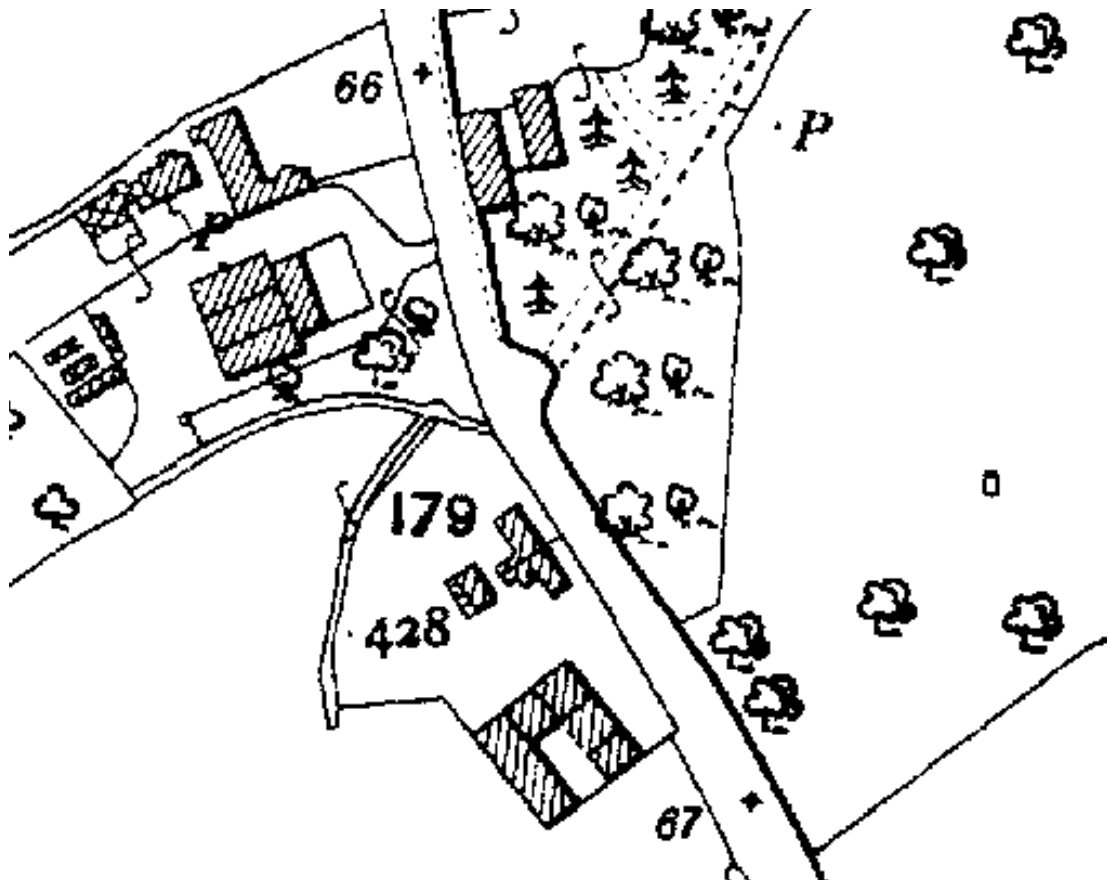


Figure 4
 Second Edition 25 inch Ordnance Survey of 1904 showing little change since 1882,
 although the shelter shed (3) was apparently divided into three sections.

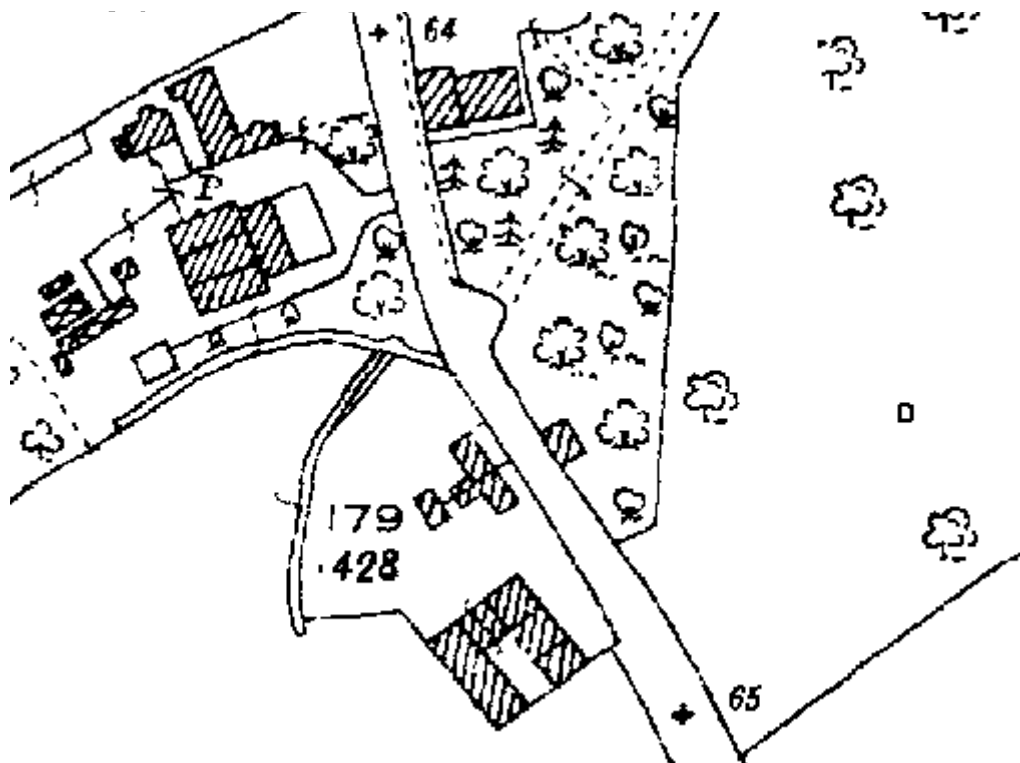


Figure 5
 Third Edition 25 inch Ordnance Survey of 1927

Building Analysis

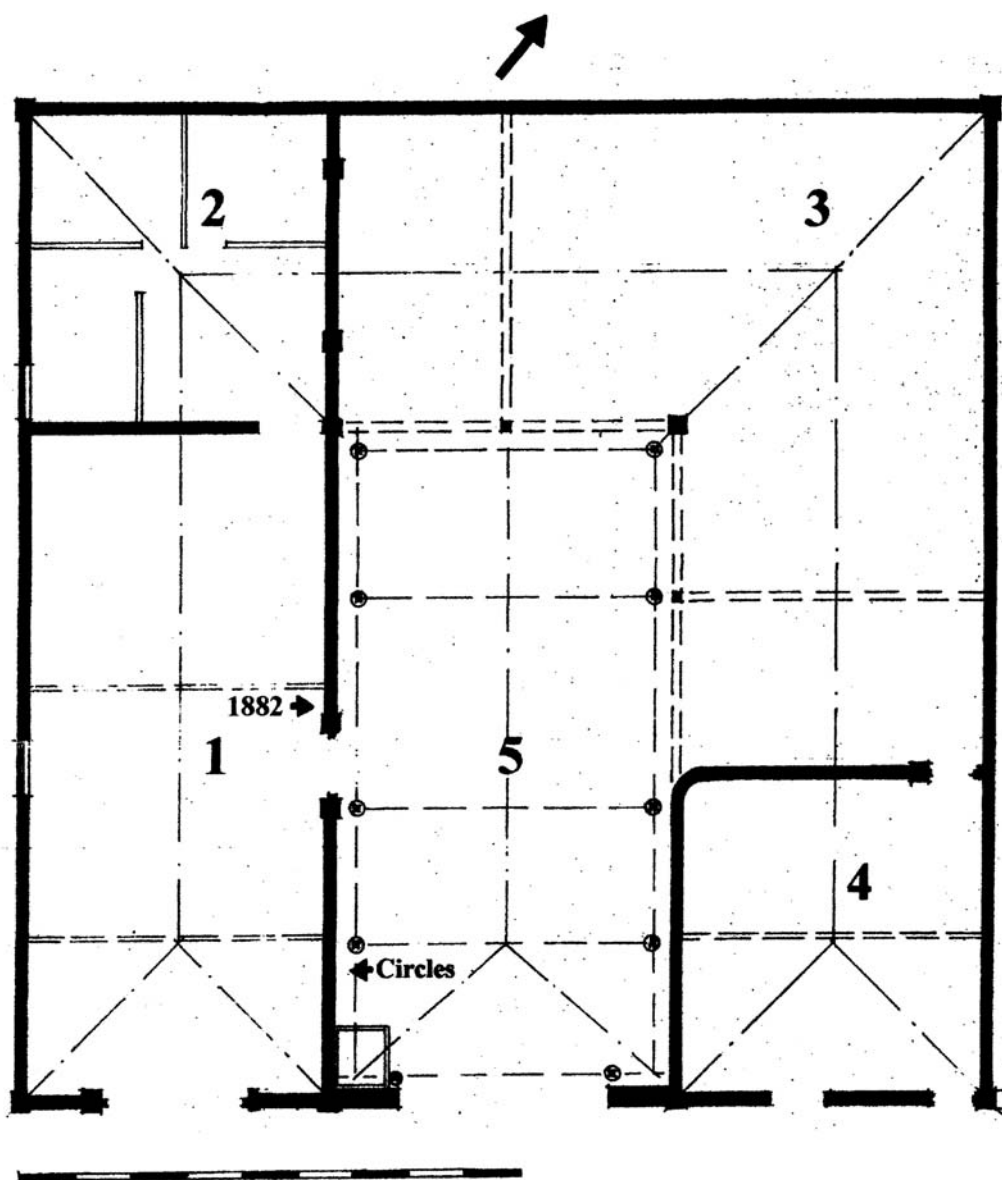


Figure 5
Block Plan of site, identifying each historic area with a number for ease of reference in the text and photographic record.
From a drawing by Les Andrews. Scale in metres

The complex is a single-storied field barn complex of red brick which dates from circa 1880 and was originally roofed with slate. All but the western range has since been re-roofed with pantile. Apotropaic circles and dates are inscribed into the brickwork where indicated.

Key

1. Field barn with original double doors to south. Designed as a mill and feed store for cattle rather than a threshing barn. Now with a mid-20th century grain sack dryer.
2. Enclosed calf shed now linked to barn but originally divided into two loose boxes and entered by two doors from the shelter shed (3). Now with cement-block calf pens.

- 3. Cattle shelter shed with open arcade to north and east. Remains of feed trough but otherwise stripped of fixtures and fittings.**
- 4. Enclosed feed storage shed with original doors to shelter shed and southern gable. Now with a secondary entrance to the south and a blocked secondary hatch to the shelter shed.**
- 5. Open cattle yard now with mid-20th century corrugated asbestos roof with pantiled gable.**

Structure and Date

River's Farm Barn is a red brick field barn with an adjoining cattle yard and shelter shed. It consists of a U-shaped range of single-storied sheds, each rising to 2.6 m at the eaves (8.5 ft), surrounding a central cattle yard entered from the south-east. The complex forms a square of 18.3 m by 18.3 m (60 ft by 60 ft) with symmetrical hipped gables and forms an elegant, compact design that was evidently produced by an architect (in contrast to the many utilitarian agricultural buildings of the period). Each range extends to 6 m (19.5 ft) in overall width. The brickwork is of high quality, with shallow pilasters flanking each original doorway and decorative cast-iron brackets with pierced spandrels framing the barn's principal entrance. The flint plinth with brick dressing was also designed for decorative effect, and the complex was expensively roofed with slate. The original slate now survives only on the western barn range (areas 1 and 2 in figure 6) and has been replaced with pantiles elsewhere (identical to that of the mid-20th century yard roof, which uses tile on its hipped southern gable –reflecting those to each side – but corrugated asbestos to east and west). The wall fabric and clasped-purlin roof structures of machine-sawn softwood with nailed collars are typical of the final quarter of the 19th century, and the building appeared for the first time on the Ordnance Survey of 1882 (figure 3). The date '1882' is boldly incised in the internal northern pier of the door linking the barn and yard, as indicated in figure 6, and the complex was built either in that year or shortly before. This graffiti reflects a long tradition of inscribing 'foundation dates' on the jambs of barn doors in Suffolk.

Original Layout and Function

The complex is divided into five areas as numbered in figure 6. The western range forms a barn with external double doors in its southern gable and an additional side-door linking it to the yard (1). Field barns of this kind were designed as granaries where cattle feed was milled and stored rather than traditional threshing barns (which, given the advent of mechanical threshing, were no longer required even in normal farmyards by the late-19th century). In this instance it lay at some distance from the main farmyard (either at Red House Farm or Poplar Farm) and was intended to serve the cattle grazing on the wet pasture in the adjoining valley. An early-20th century water pump in the south-eastern corner was made by Goslings of Ipswich and serves a water tank at the entrance to the yard. A small enclosed shed at the northern end of the barn was originally entered by two doors from the shelter shed (both now blocked) and would have contained boarded stalls that probably accommodated calves (2). The original stalls were replaced in the mid-20th century with three small pens that may reflect the 19th century layout of this space. Both the shed and barn are lit by windows with sliding louvers of vertical slats that retain original grey paint. The present door linking this shed to the barn is a later insertion which interrupts the brickwork and is not respected by pilasters. The L-shaped shelter shed is open to the yard and supported on arcade posts with bolted knee-braces in typical late-19th century manner (3); the only trace of the hay racks and mangers that would have been attached to its inner walls is the stump of a wooden post in the northern corner. A second enclosed shed at the southern end of the eastern (roadside) range would

have functioned as a feed store (such as a root house) and was entered by a small door at the eastern side of its southern gable (4). A similar door in its northern wall provided a link to the shelter shed, but a small hatch alongside is a secondary feature (since blocked). The larger of the two doors in the southern gable is also an insertion of the 20th century. The curved internal corner of this shed is often found in the walls of cattle yards elsewhere and was designed to prevent injury to the animals. The yard (5) is now covered by a later roof and was originally open, but it retains the arched piers flanking its southern entrance.

Graffiti

The complex contains several inscriptions of historic interest, including the date mentioned above. Two large and well-defined ‘daisy wheels’ have been cut with a pair of compasses into the yard wall between its entrance and the inner door to the barn. These represent well-known apotropaic (evil-averting) symbols that are often found on both domestic and agricultural buildings from the late Middle Ages onwards. Designed to protect crops and stock against ‘evil spirits’ their appearance in a relatively late context such as this demonstrates the longevity of the superstition in Suffolk. A number of pencil and chalk inscriptions on the brickwork and internal doors of the barn (notably to the west of the southern entrance and on the side-door) record the types and quantities of grain stored in the barn in the mid and late-20th century. A sack dryer was inserted into the northern half of the building at much the same time (an early form of grain dryer involving the blowing of hot air through a concrete honeycomb beneath sacks of wet grain). A chalk arrow points in the direction of the ‘Garden Field Barley’ and beans and oats are also recorded.

Alterations

The complex remains largely intact despite the partial replacement of its slate and minor alterations to its layout. The two doors to the calf shed (2) have been blocked, and a new link inserted to the barn, while a larger door has been cut into the gable of the feed shed (4). Cement render has also been applied to the lower internal walls of the barn, and a new louver inserted into its roof entrance (probably in the mid-20th century, given the fresh appearance of its internal timber, although in an older style).

Historic Significance

River’s Farm Barn is a field barn and cattle yard complex of *circa* 1880 that survives in largely original condition and represents both an attractive piece of architecture and a highly compact and efficient example of High Victorian agricultural design. It is accordingly of considerable historic interest, particularly given its conspicuous location alongside a picturesque valley on the main road at the entrance to Sproughton village. However the building is of insufficient age to meet the strict English Heritage criteria for listing, and has been largely stripped of its 19th century fixtures and fittings. The presence of particularly well preserved apotropaic ‘daisy wheels’ on the yard wall provides an additional point of historic interest which demonstrates the late survival of medieval superstition in rural Suffolk.

Appendix 1 (on accompanying CD): Full Photographic Record

Descriptions of Photographs in Appendix 1

Photograph no.

1. General view of site from High Street (B1113) to south-east showing barn complex to left and Rivers Farm Cottage in rear.
2. General view of site from High Street (B1113) to north showing River's Farm Cottage to right and barn complex in rear.
3. General view of site from pasture to south-west showing Rivers Farm Cottage behind barn complex.
4. General view of valley pasture adjoining barn complex to south-west.
5. General view of entrance to site from High Street to east showing valley pasture to rear of barn complex.
6. Exterior of barn complex seen from hill to south-west showing original slate roof of feed barn (1) and secondary pantiles elsewhere.
7. Exterior of complex from north showing garden of Rivers Farm Cottage in foreground & original slate to right.
8. Exterior of complex from south-east showing junction with garden of Rivers Farm Cottage & High Street to right.
9. Exterior of complex from north showing junction with garden of Rivers Farm Cottage & High Street to left.
10. Exterior of complex from south-east showing Rivers Farm Cottage to right.
11. Southern facade of barn complex showing 20th century yard roof in centre, milling barn (1) to left and feed store (4) to right.
12. Southern facade of complex from west showing hipped gables.
13. Detail of brick and flint plinth to western external elevation of shelter shed (3).
14. Southern external gable of milling barn (1) showing original double doors and hipped slate roof.
15. Southern external gable of 20th century pantiled covered yard (5) showing original yard wall to right and left.
16. Southern external gable of feed store (4) showing original door to right and secondary insertion to left.
17. Western side elevation of milling barn (1) showing original slatted windows and secondary ridge louver.
18. Detail of slatted window in western exterior of milling barn (1).

19. Interior of covered yard (5) from north showing yard entrance with feed store (4) to left.
20. Interior of covered yard (5) from south showing open arcade of shelter shed (3).
21. Eastern exterior of milling barn (1) from yard (5) showing side-door to left and shelter shed (3) right.
22. Southern end of eastern exterior of barn (1) showing water trough to left and position of apotropaic circles in centre.
23. Apotropaic circle inscribed to southern end of barn exterior showing post of yard roof to left.
24. Detail of 'daisy wheel' apotropaic mark to southern end of eastern exterior of barn (1).
25. Water tank in south-western corner of yard (5) showing second apotropaic circle to left of scale rod.
26. Apotropaic daisy wheel at southern end of barn's eastern exterior.
27. Detail of second (southernmost) apotropaic circle at southern end of barn exterior.
28. Detail of two apotropaic circles at southern end of barn's eastern exterior.
29. Curved western corner of feed shed (4) seen from covered yard (5) to west.
30. Northern corner of covered yard (5) showing arcade posts of shelter shed (3).
31. Detail of brackets (bolted knee-braces) to arcade post of shelter shed (3).
32. Detail of bolted braces to arcade posts of shelter shed (3).
33. Interior of shelter shed (3) from north-west showing door to feed store (4) to left and yard (5) to right.
34. Detail of machine-sawn softwood clasped-purlin roof structure of shelter shed (from north-west).
35. Interior of shelter shed (3) from south-east showing yard to left.
36. Interior of shelter shed (3) from south-east showing yard to left and blocked doors to calf shed (2).
37. Detail of fragmentary wooden post of missing manger in northern internal corner of shelter shed (3).
38. Eastern exterior of calf shed (2) from shelter shed to east showing blocked original doors to right and left.
39. Yard entrance seen from interior (5) to north, showing original curved wall piers.

40. Interior of feed store (4) from south, showing original connecting door to shelter shed (3) & blocked secondary hatch.
41. Internal southern gable of feed store (4) showing original entrance to left and secondary door to right.
42. Interior of barn (1) from north showing 20th century grain dryer in foreground.
43. Roof structure of barn (1) from north showing machine-sawn softwood rafters and nailed collars.
44. Interior of barn (1) from south showing original door to yard (5) to right.
45. Detail from beneath of secondary louver in roof of barn (1).
46. Detail of original sliding slatted window in western internal elevation of barn (1).
47. Internal southern gable of barn (1) showing original double doors and pump to left.
48. Water pump for yard tank in south-eastern internal corner of barn (1).
49. Detail of name plate to water pump in barn (1). John J Gosling & Co. Engineers Ipswich.
50. Detail of original decorative cast iron bracket to southern entrance of barn (1).
51. Eastern interior of barn (1) showing door to yard with inscribed date to left.
52. Detail of inscribed date '1882' to north of door between barn (1) and yard (5).
53. Additional detail of inscribed date 1882 to north of door between barn (1) and yard (5).
54. Detail of chalk grain list to interior of door between barn (1) and yard (5).
55. Detail of chalk lettering with arrow to secondary cement render of internal eastern elevation of barn (1). 'Garden Field Barley'.
56. Detail of internal eastern elevation of barn (1) showing chalk lettering to left and inscribed date to right.
57. Detail of mid-20th century grain sack dryer in floor of barn (1) seen from south.
58. Detail of pencilled grain list on western pier of southern door of barn (1). 'Barley 32 Beans 40 Oats 27' etc.
59. Internal south-eastern corner of calf shed (2) showing inserted door to barn (1) right and blocked door to shelter shed (3) to left.
60. Internal north-western corner of calf shed (2) showing inserted cement block stalls.
61. Internal western elevation of calf shed (2) showing original slatted window to left.

62. Internal northern corner of calf shed (2) showing blocked original door to shelter shed (3).
63. Internal northern gable of calf shed (2) showing inserted cement-blocks stalls in foreground.

Photographic Appendix 2 follows on pp. 12-16

Appendix 2 (pp. 12-16): Selected Printed Photographs



Illus. 1. General view of site from High Street (B1113) to south-east showing barn complex and adjoining pasture to left with Rivers Farm Cottage in rear.



Illus. 2. Exterior of barn complex seen from adjoining high pasture to south-west showing original slate roof of feed barn (1) to left and secondary pantiles of 20th century yard roof in centre (5) and shelter shed with feed store (3 & 4) to right.



Illus. 3. Exterior of complex adjoining garden of Rivers Farm Cottage to north showing remaining section of original slate to right.



Illus. 4. Southern facade of barn complex showing 20th century of formerly open cattle yard (5) in centre, milling barn (1) with original double-doors to left and feed store (4) to right. The larger of the two doors to the feed store is secondary.



Illus. 5. Interior of covered yard (5) from south showing open arcade of shelter shed (3) in centre and to right, with curved corner of feed store (4) to extreme right and side door to barn (1) to left. The 'daisy wheel' apotropaic symbols lie to the extreme left.



Illus. 6. Detail of 'daisy wheel' apotropaic (evil-averting) mark inscribed on brickwork at southern end of eastern exterior of barn (1) close to the yard entrance.



Illus. 7. Eastern exterior of calf shed (2) seen from shelter shed (3) to east showing flint plinth between blocked original doors to right and left.



Illus. 8. Interior of barn (1) from north showing 20th century grain dryer in foreground with original gable doors (with decorative cast-iron brackets) and water pump in rear. The sliding louver to the right is also an original feature.



Illus. 9. Detail of inscribed date 1882 on internal brickwork to north of door between barn (1) and yard (5).



Illus. 10. Detail from south of mid-20th century grain sack dryer in floor of barn (1).